



Transformation: how councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes

Best Value thematic work

Argyll and Bute Council 2024-25

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Our reports are prepared in accordance with Terms of Appointment Letter from Audit Scotland dated 18 May 2022 through which the Accounts Commission has appointed us as external auditor of Argyll and Bute Council for financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27. We undertake our audit in accordance with Part VII of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended; and our responsibilities as set out within Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice 2021.

Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to the Council are prepared for the sole use of the Council and made available to Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, the Controller of Audit. We take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any other third party.

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1) Key messages

Overview of engagement

Background

Argyll and Bute Council operate within a challenging context characterised by rural geography, population decline, workforce shortages, and a significant funding gap of approximately £14.2m (under a mid-range scenario) for the period 2026-27, rising to £58.5m by 2030-31. The Council has acknowledged that transformation is critical to maintaining service quality and achieving sustainable outcomes.

The Corporate Plan 2025-27 focuses on key priorities for the period of the plan through delivering sustainable services, growing the local economy, and empowering communities.

The Corporate Plan states that the Council's strategic approach to transformation will be underpinned by the principles of 'Connect for Success' and includes digital projects, financial transformation and a workforce strategy designed to cut reliance on temporary staff while developing the skills needed for the future. Alongside this, the Council is rolling out its 'Corporate Improvement Plan' (CIP) 2025–28, which aims to deliver better value through transformation, while learning from feedback, and improving services.

A summary of the judgements we have made for each section is detailed below:

To what extent does the council have clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability?

The Council has transformation activities that align with its strategic priorities and are intended to promote financial sustainability. These programmes aim to close the Council's medium-term budget gap through efficiency and prioritisation. Service redesign focuses on modernising delivery models and improving customer experience; workforce innovation seeks to strengthen organisational culture and skills; digital and data initiatives are designed to enhance decision-making and service accessibility; and partnership working reinforces collaboration with communities, public bodies, and stakeholders.

We have noted that the Council has a strategic framework for its transformation activities, which is outlined across various documents (including the Corporate Improvement Plan and Connect for Success principles) and the Budget Approach 2026-27 and beyond, which introduced four budget themes and refers to the service reviews of RIS and Education. The key aims for this transformation activity is to alleviate future financial pressures, and to improve service outcomes. The Council is also considering the use of a Single Authority Model. Whilst these activities are outlined, many of these are still at early stages. The Corporate Improvement Plan recognises the need for an overarching Transformation Strategy and this is included as an Action for 2026.

We have raised one recommendation in this section – please see Appendix 1.

To what extent do the council's programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans?

The Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) is overseen by the Strategic Management Team, supported by a detailed Action Plan setting out outcomes, delivery targets, and key dates across five themes, including transformation. Within this, transformation outcomes have been identified, scheduled for phased delivery

between March and October 2026. Each action has been assigned to a lead officer, with progress reported annually to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to ensure oversight. These programme management arrangements were formally endorsed by the Council in June 2025.

The CIP Action Plan establishes mechanisms for oversight. However, as implementation is at an early stage, its effectiveness will rely on consistent delivery, robust scrutiny, and evidenced progress against agreed performance measures. Connect for Success is the Council's improvement programme, directed by its senior leaders. Its principles are built into the Council's wider plans, and its progress is monitored through regular performance reviews.

A corporate Programme Management Office is currently being developed for implementation in order to provide strategic oversight on delivery of major projects and initiatives across the Council, including transformation. The Council's current work in progress includes an options appraisal of a Programme Management Office model. It is anticipated that a skills audit will then identify any potential resource gaps for consideration and approval.

Transformation projects are generally monitored via strategic committees. Capacity and specialist skills are ongoing challenges in term of resourcing transformation projects, with a recent employee survey noting that managers leading change are under workload pressures.

We have raised two recommendations in this section – please see Appendix 1.

To what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation?

The Council engaged the public in shaping its CIP 2025–2028 and transformation programme through its community planning partnerships and consultation exercises. These mechanisms ensured that residents, service users, and partners contributed to identifying priorities and influencing how services will be delivered. The Council also drew on feedback from audits, complaints, and organisational learning to strengthen its improvement agenda.

Partners and communities are involved in Connect for Success through collaboration and community planning. Their role is to identify priorities to ensure services meet local needs, however, we note the programme is primarily an internal council transformation initiative.

The Council has worked with partners on several major initiatives (such as the 'Our Modern Workspaces' project) and is in the early stages of exploring a potential Single Authority Model, which could offer a more streamlined structure incorporating NHS Highland, the Scottish Government and other key partners. Whilst the ongoing Rural Growth Deal project demonstrates major partnership investment, this is more 'investment focused' in nature, rather than focusing on delivering savings. The Council is still developing their Transformation Strategy, which is due to be presented in March 2026.

To what extent has the council considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups?

The Council has recognised the importance of assessing how its transformation initiatives affect vulnerable and protected groups. To address this, it is incorporating principles of equality and community engagement into its Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2025–2028. The Council's new Corporate Improvement Plan lists priorities in relation to transformation, such as embedding the 'Scottish Approach to Service Design' and expanding the use of artificial intelligence technology. However, many of these targets are set for 2026 and beyond, which means it is still too early to fully assess the impact of these actions. We have

noted that the Council uses Integrated Impact Assessments to ensure that equality is considered when putting together transformation proposals.

2) Introduction

The [2023 Local Government Overview \(LGO\)](#) notes that councils have never faced such a challenging situation. Service demands have increased after the Covid-19 pandemic and funding is forecast to reduce in real terms. Transformation, through greater collaboration with partners, will be key for councils to deliver more sustainable service models in challenging financial climates.

This report sets out how the council is redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes.

The [Accounts Commission's Strategy \(2021-26\)](#) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The [Code of Audit Practice](#) sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on transformation and how councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes. In carrying out the work, auditors have considered the following questions:

- To what extent does the council have clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability?
- To what extent do the council's programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans?
- To what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation?
- To what extent has the council considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups?

An improvement action plan is included at Appendix 1 of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response including responsible officers and dates for implementation.

The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

3) Transformation planning

This section of the report examines to what extent, the council has clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability.

Background

The council needs to ensure it can deliver sustainable services now and in the future, and difficult decisions will need to be made to achieve this. The Accounts Commission’s [Local government budgets 2024/25](#) briefing noted that councils’ cumulative funding gap between 2025/26 and 2026/27 is £780 million. This means that, cumulatively, councils need to identify and deliver recurring measures such as savings or increased income of five per cent of their overall revenue budget to be financially sustainable in the short term.

Findings and evidence relating to the council’s transformation planning

Findings	Evidence
<p>The Council has clear plans for the transformation of services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In early 2025, the Accounts Commission reported that the Council has “a real opportunity to harness a long-standing culture of innovation as it looks set to close a funding gap of nearly £29 million, rethink how services are delivered and ensure it has a stable workforce”. • The Council’s approach to transformation is embedded within its strategic plans. Their Corporate Plan 2025-27 clearly outlines their vision for service delivery, and is aligned with seven strategic priorities (Communities, Children and Young People, Housing and Population, Transport and Infrastructure, Environment, Sustainable Service Delivery, and Advocacy for Argyll and Bute). Whilst transformation is not treated as a standalone initiative as such, it is included within the framework for these priorities. The Council’s overarching Transformation Strategy is due to be completed by March 2026 – we have raised a recommendation relating to this – please see Appendix 1. • The Council’s Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) 2025–2028 identifies five levers for transformation: financial sustainability, service redesign, workforce innovation, digital and data, and partnership working. Collectively, these levers are intended to secure Best Value and enable the Council to respond to financial pressures while improving outcomes for communities. The CIP is designed to align with the Council’s Connect for Success programme and includes nine transformation outcomes which are scheduled for phased delivery between March and October 2026. • Connect for Success is Argyll and Bute Council’s transformation programme designed to create a “future-fit”

	<p>organisation. It aims to improve collaboration, empower staff, use data-driven decision-making, and embed continuous learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additionally, the Council also presented a document to board entitled 'Budget approach 2026-27 and beyond' in June 2025. This sets out how the Council intends to address their financial challenges over the next five years. The Council is essentially adopting a more strategic approach to savings and is moving away from a 'short-term' approach, aligning transformation with the corporate priorities. • The four key priorities for the budget relate to empowering communities, increasing income, right sizing the Council's asset base, and delivering services differently. It also outlines two significant service redesigns for Roads and Infrastructure Services, and Education. • A Budget Working Group has been set up to provide oversight on these plans. There are also considerations ongoing in relation to carrying out budget consultations – for example, a high-level budget simulation exercise.
<p>The Council's current plans for transformation include some specific projects with quantified costs and benefits, although some projects are still in the early stages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has several projects ongoing. This includes the Rural Growth Deal – a 10-year programme which is designed to deliver around £70m of investment into the area. The Scottish and UK Government have each allocated £25m to the programme, and the Council/partners will contribute at least £20m of funding. Quarterly updates are provided – for example, a report presented in August 2025 provided detail on the different stages of the project, and progress made. • Updates have included quantified benefits – for example, to introduce 300 additional jobs, 6,500 m2 of new business space, and to provide training opportunities for 6,000 students. There are also quantified costs – for example, £9m of funding will be given towards regenerating Rothesay Pavillion. • For the service redesigns (Roads and Infrastructure, and Education), outside consultants have been engaged to support with detailed scoping/project actions. • The other four thematic groups are still at an early stage of progression, although scoping projects are currently underway.
<p>The Council has ambitious plans for transformation over the longer term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At a national level, the Council has connections to several national transformation initiatives. This includes the Solace/IS Transformation Programme, which has been created to help Scottish Councils work towards a blueprint for the "council of the future". This initiative incorporates six anchors and involves volunteers from several local councils in Scotland. Argyll and Bute Council are linked to this – their Chief Executive (Pippa

	<p>Milne) leads the Leadership Practitioner Forum (which is embedded into the Solace/IS Transformation Programme).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Council is currently exploring a Single Authority Model. This would effectively be a model where multiple public services (Councils, NHS Boards, housing authorities) are unified into one structured model. A Chief Executive report was presented to the Council in April 2025, outlining the potential benefits and efficiencies, such as pooled resourcing and improved outcomes for more rural/isolated communities. We have noted that none of the potential benefits have been quantified yet, as it is still in the early stages of consideration. Per an update presented in September 2025, the Council are still considering potential options, noting that local partners must submit detailed models for consideration to the Scottish Government in December 2025.
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Recommendations

We have identified one improvement recommendation as part of our work on the council's transformational planning. Recommendations have been included in the action plan at Appendix 1.

4) Programme management

This section of the report examines to what extent, the council's programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans.

Background

It is essential that the council has good programme management arrangements in place to ensure it is making sufficient progress against its transformation plans. It is important that the council has the structures and the staffing resource in place to deliver its transformation ambitions. In addition, the council must ensure that both senior officers and elected members have appropriate oversight of progress.

Findings and evidence relating to the council's programme management arrangements

Findings	Evidence
<p>The Council does not have a Programme Management Office/special committee specifically for the delivery of transformational activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council currently does not have an operational Programme Management Office, although one is currently in development. A short-life working group has been created to facilitate and develop this – as of November 2025, the group have been appraising options and working with partners to identify an appropriate model. The second phase of this will involve establishing specific procedures and processes, with a further internal workshop planned in December 2025. • Transformation projects are generally monitored via strategic committees (for example, the Policy and Resources committee). For larger scale transformation activities, the Executive Leadership Team ultimately acts as a Transformation Programme Board. • We have raised a recommendation relating to this – please see Appendix 1.
<p>The Council faces challenges in terms of resourcing transformation activities effectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity and skills are a challenge for the Council in terms of resourcing transformation projects, primarily due to the Council's rural and dispersed geography. • The Council have stated that additional consideration in terms of resources will be given as the Project Management Office development continues. The Council's Employee Survey results suggested that managers tasked with delivering change are facing workload pressures. A specific report has not been published online for this, although high level details are published on the Council's My Council Works site. • As part of the Council's Connect for Success model, they published a People Strategy which covers the 2024-2028

	<p>period. This identifies that the Council's workforce is integral in terms of delivering their corporate outcomes successfully and identified four core areas in terms of focus for the workforce – attracting and keeping talent people, providing a positive employee experience, creating a 'One Council, One Place' culture, and supporting learning and growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have raised a recommendation relating to this – please see Appendix 1.
<p>The Council has not yet implemented large-scale transformation that delivers ongoing savings. To secure long-term financial stability and ease pressure on services, the Council must accelerate its transformation efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As we noted earlier, the Corporate Improvement Plan is still in relatively early stages, and no costed/specific projects have been announced. Potentially significant transformation projects (such as the Single Authority Model) are still in relatively early stages. The Council's Rural Growth Deal is currently progressing, although this is designed more around investing in the local area, as opposed to creating savings. • Per the Council's Budget Outlook 2026-27 to 2030-31, there are several budget pressures due to service demand. For example, there are rising pressures in education in terms of additional support needs and school residential placements, whilst social work is also impacted by a growing older population (who have more complex support needs), and an increase for demand for mental health services. • The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan Action Plan notes that a Transformation Strategy (which will be aligned to a longer-term financial approach) is currently being developed, with a target completion date of March 2026 (we raised a recommendation relating to this as part of Section 3 of this report).

Recommendations

We have identified two improvement recommendations as part of our work on this section. These recommendations have been included in the action plan at Appendix 1.

5) Partnership working and community engagement

This section of the report considers to what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation.

Background

The [Best Value in Scotland](#) report noted that councils must now rethink how they work together, and with local partners and communities, to provide financially sustainable services. Few councils provide services jointly or share support services across different councils to a great extent.

Findings and evidence relating to the council's partnership working and community engagement arrangements

Findings	Evidence
<p>The Council is working in partnership with other bodies to deliver transformational change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See 'Case Study 1', which shows evidence of the Council working with other bodies (including other public sector and third sector bodies) as part of the 'Our Modern Workspaces' project. • As noted earlier, the Council is also considering a Single Authority Model, which would involve working with other bodies (for example, NHS Highland, the Scottish Government, and other local authorities). The benefits of implementing this model include simplified management structures and consistency across service standards, alongside potential financial savings including consolidated assets and shared systems. The Council's consideration of this model is still in early stages.
<p>There are funding arrangements between the Council and partners for ongoing projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rural Growth Deal involves a joint funding arrangement between the Council and partners – there is £25m of funding from the Scottish Government and £25m from the UK Government. An update report on Transformational Projects (taken to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure committee in September 2025, and inclusive of the Rural Growth Deal) notes that from £101.7m of ongoing projects, £51.4m is funded from external partners. The Rural Growth Deal also includes a commitment for the Council and its key delivery partners to provide a minimum of £20m match funding over the lifespan of the deal. • As part of Community Regeneration Partnership Funding, the UK Government has also committed £20m to the Argyll and Bute Council. This involves the Council identifying five priority projects (per the Policy and Resources Committee in February 2025), which include creating affordable housing for key workers, and contributing towards the construction of key

buildings in Oban Airport Business Park. As above – these projects are more investment based in nature, rather than transformational in terms of savings.

- As noted earlier, The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan Action Plan notes that a Transformation and Savings Strategy (which will be aligned to a longer-term financial approach) is currently being developed, with a target completion date of March 2026. Once this has been produced, we will expect to see more examples of transformation projects which involve funding arrangements between the Council and partners where possible.
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Recommendations

We have not identified any recommendations to report as part of this thematic review section.

6) Impact of transformation

This section of the report assesses to what extent, the council has considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups.

Background

It is important that the council has success measures in place to demonstrate the impact of its transformational activity on service quality; outcomes for people who use services, inequalities and/or savings.

Findings and evidence relating to the impact of the council's transformation activity

Findings	Evidence
<p>There is evidence that timely equality impact assessments have informed the council's transformation plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council uses Integrated Impact Assessments to ensure that transformation proposals consider equality issues – for example, socio-economic impacts, children's rights, island communities, and consumer duty. This integrated approach was updated in 2025 to streamline multiple frameworks into one tool. • From our review of a sample of equality assessments, we found that these are carried out at an appropriate stage in a project's development. For example, for the Our Modern Workspace project (per Case Study 1), the equality assessment was produced in June 2022 and is sufficiently detailed. This assessment demonstrates that equality groups have been consulted where necessary – for example, staff were consulted through surveys to identify their preferences on hybrid working. There were also board meetings with representatives from multiple stakeholders (including Trade Union representatives).
<p>The Council have produced a Corporate Improvement Action Plan Action Plan, although it is still too early to assess the impact of the actions listed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council have produced a Corporate Improvement Plan Action Plan, which aligns with the Corporate Improvement Plan. It lists more specific outcomes in terms of transformations, with examples including ensuring the Scottish Approach to Service Design is embedded into the transformation programme (the success measure of this relates to reporting on the utilization of the framework in at least 3 service change processes, with a target date of June 2026), and using Power BI reports to support the Connect for Success principle of data and evidence driven (the success measure here would be increasing the Power BI reports by 6 per quarter, with a target date of March 2026). • As the Action Plan has only been produced recently, many of the target dates are in 2026 and beyond, meaning it is

	currently difficult to assess whether any of these outcomes have been delivered successfully.
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Case study 1

Our Modern Workspace

Brief description of the transformation project

In 2021, the Council introduced a project called 'Our Modern Workspace'. This commenced following the Covid-19 pandemic and involved redesigning workspaces to align with the Council's hybrid working policies. The initial phase of this project took place over 2021 – 2024, with work underway at present for further developments. There are several strategic benefits to this project:

- It aligns with the 'right sizing the Council's asset base, per the Council's strategic plan.
- It allows the Council to share workspaces with partner bodies, and maximise their benefit to the community and public, private and voluntary sectors.
- There is potential for released assets to be used for housing projects, which would help to address the current housing shortages in the area.
- It supports employee wellbeing – encouraging a hybrid working approach, which employees have cited as being important to their wellbeing. The 2025 Staff Survey rated the Council's flexibility in terms of where employees work as 3.76 (up from 3.41 in 2024).

Success measures in place to measure the impact of the project are as follows:

- Reduced costs and more income generated through shared use of workspaces and rationalised estate (efficiencies in terms of utilities, maintenance and non-domestic rates).
- Reduced travel costs.
- Improved employee satisfaction.

Several partners have been involved in this project, including the Health and Social Care Partnership, Argyll Countryside Trust, Community Planning Partnership, and MAKI Pups (Mid Argyll's first fully outdoor nursey), with Argyll and Bute Council acting as the lead partner in this engagement. These partners were involved in terms of engagement in developing plans around the use of buildings and sharing spaces. Trade Union Partners also contributed to the short life working group, which influenced the Council's hybrid working policy.

The Council has engaged with communities in terms of the project's development and delivery. An example of this is when the customer service centre at Eaglesham House in Rothesay (Isle of Bute) was closed, due to the building being old and poor in terms of accessibility. The customer service centre was subsequently moved to a street front location in the town centre. This was considered a success amongst the community and is well used.

As part of the project, the Council has considered the impact on protected and vulnerable groups. Equality assessments were developed for individual aspects of the project, including a hybrid/flexible working policy. The development of the project has also been influenced by engagement with third sector/vulnerable groups. For example, the Customer Service Point changes are considered in terms of having both a digital and physical component, alongside online and in-person channels to identify the needs of customers within the community. The third sector was also involved in certain aspects.

Alongside cost benefits (the disposal of buildings such as Eaglesham House, recurring savings in terms of utilities), there are numerous realised service quality benefits from this transformation project:

- Reduced number of assets for the Council to maintain, and reduction in asset management costs.
- Improved employee satisfaction (as noted previously, the 2025 Staff Survey rated the Council's flexibility in terms of where employees work as 3.76 (up from 3.41 in 2024).
- Reduced carbon footprint.
- Improved accessibility for communities to public facing buildings.
- Increased footfall to improved Customer Service Points

Recommendations

We have not identified any recommendations to report as part of this thematic review section.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

The table overleaf details the issues/risks that we have identified as part of this thematic review and our recommendations to the Council to address.

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p>1. The Council has not yet produced a Transformation Strategy – Level 2</p> <p>There is a risk that without a Transformation Strategy, future budget gaps cannot be addressed in an appropriate or sustainable way.</p>	<p>The Council should ensure their overarching Transformation Strategy is produced by their target date of March 2026 and is followed by a costed action plan.</p>	<p>Management’s response</p> <p>The Council will develop an overarching Transformation Strategy by 31/03/2026, which will be followed by a costed action plan.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Head of Customer Support/Head of Financial Services</p> <p>Implementation date</p> <p>31 March 2026</p>
<p>2. The Council does not have a fully operational Programme Management Office for their transformation activity – Level 2</p> <p>There is a risk that transformation projects are not appropriately monitored and controlled without a specific Programme Management Office.</p>	<p>The Council should consider the creation of a Programme Management Office to manage Transformation and other major projects. This will ensure oversight and increase the pace of change.</p>	<p>Management’s response</p> <p>The Council will consider options for the creation of a Programme Management Office to manage Transformation and other major projects.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Head of Commercial Services</p> <p>Implementation date</p> <p>September 2026</p>

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p>3. The Council is facing challenges in terms of resourcing their transformation programmes effectively – Level 2</p> <p>There is a risk that planned improvements and savings will not be delivered if the Council cannot resource their transformation programme effectively.</p>	<p>The Council should ensure appropriate resource and capacity to deliver transformation projects.</p>	<p>Management’s response</p> <p>The Council will consider options for resourcing Transformation projects to ensure appropriate capacity.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Executive Leadership Team</p> <p>Implementation date</p> <p>September 2026</p>

Appendix 2 – Follow up of previously reported Best Value findings for the Council

We have followed up on previously reported Best Value findings, see the table below for the progress the Council has made during 2024/25.

Previously reported Best Value findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25	Conclusions reached
<p>Workforce Data and IT Systems</p> <p>The Council has identified it could make better use of the data available to inform is workforce planning and is currently replacing its exiting HR and Payroll system.</p> <p>Risk – The new system does not provide the data to enable informed decisions in workforce planning.</p>	<p>Management Response: The key outcome here is to ensure the council is able to easily track vacancies. We will actively engage with our software supplier and will explore all options in ensuring the council can report on this important metric.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: September 2025</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>The Council has engaged with a software supplier, and they have had an initial assessment carried out. The findings from this noted that it is not straightforward to maintain records of vacancies within the configuration of the new HR and payroll system. The issue will be reviewed and a solution sought when the new recruitment/onboarding functionality is live. The work package for this has been rescheduled by the Project Board for completion by the end of March 2026.</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>We have noted that the response to this recommendation is still ongoing, and we will review the updates as part of our work in 2025/26.</p>
<p>Integrating New Strategic Plans</p> <p>The new Council administration is bringing an updated Corporate</p>	<p>Management Response: The people strategy and strategic workforce</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>The first annual progress report was submitted to Head of Customer Support Services in December 2025 for</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Recommendation has been addressed – satisfactory.</p>

Previously reported Best Value findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25	Conclusions reached
<p>Plan and strategic frameworks into effect from 2024/25. Existing Workforce Plans and People Strategy objectives are to be achieved by 2028 and may need to be revisited.</p> <p>Risk – Risk of significant changes being made resulting in strategic misalignment between updated core strategies and other policies and objectives already in place, such as the Workforce Plan and People Strategy.</p>	<p>plan will be reviewed annually.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: June 2025</p>	<p>management scrutiny. We have reviewed this progress report, and it contains detail on performance highlights, achievements, key challenges for the future, upcoming milestones, and progress against Key Performance Indicators (such as turnover rate and average time to hire).</p>	

Review of Flexible Working Policy

The Council is currently in the process of updating aspects of its operational activities to accommodate the hybrid working style. This is based on a newly introduced Flexible and Hybrid Working policy which is yet to be reviewed.

Management Response:

Impact measures for the flexible and hybrid working policy are set out in section 10 of the policy document. These will be monitored and reported regularly.

Progress against the recommendation

This action has been completed, and report presented to the Strategic Management Team. We have reviewed the report, which notes that the Council’s flexible working policy is valued by employees, and there is minimal evidence that flexible working influences recruitment or staff leaving. Recommendations in the report include the need for clearer processes, and stronger promotion of the flexible working policy during recruitment.

Conclusions

Recommendation has been addressed – satisfactory.

Previously reported Best Value findings

Management response and implementation timeframe

Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25

Conclusions reached

Risk – Changes to working policies may have an adverse impact on service delivery or quality that are not identified in a timely manner.

Implementation timescale: June 2025

Workforce skills and Capacity KPIs

The Council is yet to perform comprehensive reviews and assessments to determine cost savings and benefits of its workforce measures. There is a lack of clear KPI's that would allow management to continually monitor savings and other benefits from workforce skill and capacity measures.

Risk – The Council may struggle to measure and identify progress towards Workforce Plan objectives. Without clear targets and KPIs, the Council could face a lack of direction and fail to meet its targets.

Management's response: KPIs for Agile working will be identified in the project documentation. General KPIs for Strategic Workforce plan and People Strategy will be included in the first annual review (outlined above)

Implementation timescale: June 2025

Progress against the recommendation

KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) have been included in the project documentation for the Agile project. People Strategy KPIs have been set out in the review document, and the Council will continue to monitor these on an annual basis.

Conclusions

Recommendation has been addressed – satisfactory.

Previously reported Best Value findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25	Conclusions reached
<p>Agile Project implementation The Agile Working framework is still at its inception stage, with a project Initiation document laying out aims and objectives along with Success measures. However, there was limited mention of how these objectives will be achieved, and SMART targets are yet to be agreed.</p> <p>Risk – The Council may implement an Agile Project without clearly defined and achievable actions, potentially hindering the successful attainment of desired outcomes.</p>	<p>Management’s response: Objectives and Actions for Agile Project will be reviewed and agreed with ELT</p> <p>Implementation timescale: April 2025</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>Initial goals and actions have been agreed with the ELT (Executive Leadership Team). Benchmarking has been undertaken in relation to generic job descriptions for admin/project roles.</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Recommendation has been addressed – satisfactory.</p>
<p>Workforce Monitoring</p> <p>The Council has several reviews lined up which are targeted for completion within the 24/25 Financial year, looking at Workforce Planning measures and other projects which have recently been implemented.</p> <p>Risk – There is a risk that the Council may not complete the</p>	<p>Management’s response The HR and OD manager will provide a 6 monthly progress report on actions within the workplan specifically linked to workforce planning or people strategy actions.</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>A monthly highlight report is presented to the Head of Customer Support Services, and this includes updates on priority actions linked to the People Strategy and Strategic Workforce plan. Progress reporting will be added to the service quarterly reporting dashboard by 31/03/2026.</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>We have noted that the response to this recommendation is still ongoing, and we will review the Council’s progress reporting implementation as part of our work in 2025/26.</p>

Previously reported Best Value findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25	Conclusions reached
<p>scheduled reviews, resulting in delayed identification of issues and missed opportunities for improvement, potentially impacting the Council's ability to achieve its strategic objectives.</p>	<p>Implementation timescale: September 2025</p>		

Transformation – How councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes

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